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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001130

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SPECIAL OPERATION ACTION DAMAGES U.S. RELATIONSHIP  
IN WASIT PROVINCE

Classified By: Acting political counselor John G. Fox reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Wasit PRT cable.

[11](#). (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

[12](#). (S / / REL TO USA, ACGU) Summary: A deadly American operation in a residential area of Al Kut has seriously set back cooperation between the United States and Iraqis in Wasit province. A unilateral U.S. action in the early hours of April 26 resulted in the death of two Iraqis. A man and a woman were killed by an American sniper during an action initiated to capture a Jaish Al Mahdi (JAM) operative, who was not captured. A long and difficult meeting involving the PRT, coalition forces and local leaders went some distance toward tamping down considerable bitterness, but the incident could still result in extensive damage to America's reputation in Wasit province. We have been counseled to avoid the PC and Governorate center throughout this week, and have canceled three days of movements. End summary.

"WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?"

[13](#). (C) On April 26, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Wasit received an early morning call from Wasit's new Provincial Council (PC) Chairman Mahmud Abd Al Rida Talal. Chairman Talal, an Independent who ran on the ISCI list, was highly agitated and explained that the actions of the American forces the night before had "changed everything" between the PRT, the Coalition and the Provincial Council. He requested the PRT set up a meeting between him and the senior American military commander in the province. This was the PRT's first notification of the event. The PRT relayed Talal's message to the senior U.S. military commander in Wasit, who explained the details of the past night's action and agreed to meet and fully brief the Governor and the PC Chairman. After several rather emotional telephone exchanges, one in which the Governor unexpectedly hung up on the PRT Political Officer, and another in which the PC Chairman relayed that the PC was considering a total boycott of the PRT, the PC Chairman and the Governor finally and rather reluctantly agreed to meet the PRT and the American military commander at the Governor's office at 1600 hrs on April 26.

THE THREE HOUR MEETING ) "American Terrorism"

[14](#). (SBU) The meeting began with frosty greetings and formal handshakes from the PC Chairman Talal, PC member Shamil Mansur Iyal of the Iraqi Constitutional Party, and Governor Tarfah. The PRT Team Leader and Political officer represented the PRT, while the 41st Fires BDE Commander represented Coalition forces. Governor Tarfah initiated the meeting by stating that the actions of the previous night were unacceptable, that the people of the province were very unhappy, and that he had been in contact with the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense about the situation. The PC Chairman explained that this was an unpleasant start for the new PC (seated on April 10), that people were beginning to be

more comfortable with Americans but that this action, which some people were calling "American terrorism," had set back the relationship significantly. He relayed that he had just left the PC where they were discussing a range of options, including boycotting the PRT and petitioning for legal action against the Americans involved.

THE THREE-HOUR MEETING ) The Explanation

15. (S/ / REL USA, ACGU) Col Francey of the 41st Fires Bde briefed the events of the incident to the Governor, PC representatives, the Wasit Chief of Police, MG Raad, Iraqi Qrepresentatives, the Wasit Chief of Police, MG Raad, Iraqi National Police Commander Hussein al-Awwadi, as well as Iraqi Army Generals, LTG Ali Al Ghaydan, Commander of Iraqi Land Forces, LTG Uthman, 8th IA Division Commander, and BG Abd, 32nd IA Bde. Col Francey expressed regret both for the loss of life and for not having notified the Provincial Chief of Police and Army, which is his normal procedure in such cases.

In response to the PC Chairman's reference to a possible PC boycott of the PRT, the PRT Team Leader stated that this would undermine the PRT's efforts to help the Iraqi people. After hearing the coalition explanation of the events of the previous night, the PC Chairman stated that he and the PC are interested in supporting the law, are glad when criminals are arrested, and had this been a combined U.S. ) Iraqi action there would not have been as strong a reaction against it. He went on to say that the action had placed the members of the government in a difficult position because, as they work with Americans, the people now may accuse them of being American agents. Both Governor Tarfah and Chairman Talal made the point that unspecified groups of people will use this issue against the Americans and the Iraqi government officials who

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work closely with them.

THE THREE-HOUR MEETING ) LTG al-Ghaydan

16. (S/ / REL USA, ACGU) LTG al-Ghaydan, speaking for "Baghdad," stated that he did not hold the forces in the province responsible, but rather wanted to know with whom, at the Iraqi national level, this action had been coordinated. He further stated that, as the forces involved had come from Baghdad, he would discuss the matter with Coalition Forces representatives in Baghdad. He stated that the Security Agreement requires Iraqi approval for these types of actions and that, if they occurred in the future without approval, Iraqi forces would oppose them. The meeting ended with a short press conference, during which LTG Ghaydan made a brief statement. He and Colonel Francey then took questions from assembled reporters. By the end of the over three-hour meeting, the mood of the participants had lightened considerably. The Iraqi security forces promised to continue to work closely with the American forces in the province. The PC Chairman, along with the two other PC members present, vowed to work through these difficulties and once again get back to a close working relationship with the PRT. Still, we have been told to stay clear of the PC and the Governorate Center at least through this week, and normally friendly contacts are sending signals to steer clear for awhile. We have canceled three days of movements.

7 (C) Comment: That the American relationship with the people of Wasit has been damaged is undeniable, but how badly we cannot yet know. The long and, at times, very difficult meeting between Iraqi and U.S. representatives in the Governor's office certainly helped to defuse a highly charged situation. That the police, the Army, the Governor and the leaders of the Provincial Council all agreed to move forward together with the Americans is good. Less certain is whether this attitude will extend to all elements of Wasit society.

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